



Mississippi AER Annual Conference

2023

Empowering Individuals with Vision Loss Through Social Well-Being

Venue: USM Marine Education Center • Ocean Springs, MS

Friday & Saturday, October 27-28, 2023

Early Bird Registration Deadline: October 6

Registration Deadline: October 15, 11:59 PM

[Register HERE](#)



[Discount Hotel Rates HERE](#)



AER Members & MDRS Staff: \$115 • Non-AER Members: \$140

FREE for special groups (see registration link for details)

Continuing Education credits/units available

For additional information: info@mississippiaer.org

Facebook: [@MississippiAER](#)

Annual MAER In-Person 2023

Conference:

Empowering Individuals Who are Blind and Visually Impaired through Social Well-Being

Course Description: This course is designed to help professionals working with individuals with visual impairments or blindness increase their knowledge and skills in adapted physical education, recreational and leisure activities, while gaining an increased understanding of issues related to living with vision loss, challenges in maintaining mental health, overcoming social barriers and possible solutions/strategies for accessing recreation and leisure activities in order to support increased social well-being of such individuals.

Conference Objectives:

1. Participants will identify three or more recreational activities to empower individuals who are blind or visually impaired
2. Participants will outline three or more strategies to help individuals who are blind or visually impaired recognize resources to combat isolation.
3. Participants will identify at least three physical barriers which hinder social wellbeing for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
4. Participants will list at least five psychosocial issues related to adjustment to vision loss for individuals and their families.

Target Audience:

Parents, Students with Visual Impairments, Counselors, Special Educators (Transition Coordinators, Paraprofessionals, Teachers), Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Teachers of the Visually Impaired, Orientation and Mobility Specialists, Certified Low Vision Therapists, School Administrators, Veterans, Employers, Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialists, Social Workers, Visual Impairment Services Team Coordinators, and Advocates

Continuing Education:

Continuing Education Credits (1.0 CEUs) for Mississippi Educators has been awarded. Other professions credits available are: ACVREP, CRCC and Mississippi OT – 10 hours.

Special note: Each session less than 1 hour is not approved for credit with CRCC.

Annual MAER In-Person 2023 Conference: *Empowering Individuals Who are Blind and Visually Impaired through Social Well-Being* **AGENDA**

Day 1, Friday, October 27, 2023

8:30 – 8:45	Opening Session & Welcoming
8:45 – 10:00	KEYNOTE: Dr. LaShawna Fant: <i>Elevating Social Well-being While Adjusting to Blindness</i>
10:00 – 10:10	Break
10:10 – 11:10	DeVonda Elliott: <i>Recreation Therapy Insight of Others-A Positive Outlook</i>
11:10 – 12:20	Lunch and MAER Award Ceremony
12:20 – 1:20	Concurrent Sessions A & B: with CUPCAKES provided by CATT! Session A: (Presentation Room near Vendors): Dr. Zaccheus Ahonle, Dr. Phillip Rumrill, Dr. Stuart Rumrill: <i>Section A Ethical Considerations in Empowering Individuals with Visual Impairments: Understanding the 2023 Code of Professional Ethics for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors</i> (NOT APPROVED FOR OT CEU)
	Session B (Main Conference Room): Tyler Griffen: <i>Breaking Barriers to Recreation and Leisure for the Blind and Visually Impaired</i>
1:20 – 2:10	Exhibitors & Networking
2:10 – 3:10	Destin Parsley & Garrett Davenport: <i>Recreation Therapy for Individuals with Vision Loss</i>
3:10 – 3:20	Break
3:20 – 4:20	Kendra Farrow: <i>Finding Hope in the Darkness: Perspectives on Adjusting to Vision Impairment</i>
4:20 – 5:25	Panel Discussion: Herb Humphrey, Moderator & Panelist, Garrett Pendergast, Kendra Farrow, & Tracy Ferro: <i>Vision Beyond Limits: Embracing Recreation and Leisure with Vision Loss</i>
5:25 – 5:30	Wrap UP & Door Prize

Empowering Individuals Who are Blind and Visually Impaired through Social Well-Being

AGENDA

Day 2, Saturday, October 28, 2023

7:30 – 8:15	Continental Breakfast, Door Prize & Gold Exhibitor Presentation: Cheryl Saucier, <i>Mountain View Low Vision Services</i>
8:15 – 9:30	KEYNOTE: Dr. Malinda Wimbs: <i>Finding the Courage To Dream Big</i>
9:30 – 10:30	Dr. Shelly Bates & Nancy Raia: <i>Using Creative Art to Break Barriers</i>
10:30 – 11:00	Dorothy Young: <i>Services in Mississippi for Persons Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired</i>
11:00 – 12:00	Dr. Joann Judge: <i>Oh Yeah... Goalball, Beep Baseball AND Blind Soccer!!</i>
12:00 – 12:30	Exhibitors & Networking
12:30 – 1:00	Box Lunch
1:00 – 1:50	MAER Business Meeting
1:50 – 2:00	Closing/Door Prize

Empowering Individuals Who are Blind and Visually Impaired through Social Well-Being

AGENDA

Day 1, Friday, October 27, 2023

Full Sessions

Keynote

Presenter (Keynote): Dr. LaShawna Fant ; Mississippi School for the Blind; Teacher of the Visually Impaired

Bio:

I am an 18-year educator of visually impaired and blind students. I am blind and lost my vision while a senior in high school. I have also been a vocational counselor and transition specialist. I have a doctorate degree in counseling. Additionally, I am the CEO of Fant Fresh Start Consulting, LLC. With this business, I help guide individuals living with blindness, as well as families, employers, schools, and others.

Presentation Title	“Elevating Social Well-being While Adjusting to Blindness”
General description of the presentation (synopsis in 2-3 sentences used to attract audiences)	Life is full of adjustments but can be enjoyed by attaining skills and knowledge to aid us in living our best lives. This presentation will supply tools to better equip us to flourish in our self-well-being and regain our purpose.
List at least two Learning Objectives (At the end of this session, participants will...)	1.Participants will learn adaptive skills and strategies to aid in enhancing their lives and the lives of their clients to promote adjustment to vision loss. 2. Participants will gain knowledge of resources to elevate their social well-being for promoting adjustment to vision loss.
Session length/duration (Your presentation needs to last no less than 60 minutes)	75 minutes

Session 2

Presenter:

DeVonda Elliott Department of Veterans Affairs; Recreation Therapy Supervisor

Bio:

Dr. Elliott is a Recreation Therapist with the Department of Veterans Affairs for 12 years. She is also an adjunct professor at Jackson State University in the Department of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation.

Presentation Title	Recreation Therapy Insight of Others "A Positive Outlook"
General description of the presentation (synopsis in 2-3 sentences used to attract audiences)	This presentation will provide an overview of recreational therapy and the therapeutic benefit for individuals with a diagnosis of legal blindness/visual impairment. Also, this presentation will provide resources and tools to assist individuals experiencing challenges transitioning back into the community after recent diagnosis.
List at least two Learning Objectives (At the end of this session, participants will...)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Participant will learn strategies aimed at aiding individuals with vision loss in overcoming obstacles to their involvement in recreational and leisure activities.2. Participants will identify barriers that hinder engagement in recreational and leisure activities, including but not limited to fear, limited knowledge, and financial constraints.
Session length/duration	60

Concurrent Sessions 3 & 4 with Cupcakes*!

Session 3: Presenters: Dr. Zaccheus Ahonle, Dr. Phillip Rumrill, and Dr. Stuart Rumrill,

Zaccheus J. Ahonle, Ph.D., CRC, is an Assistant Professor of Counselor Education and Program Coordinator of Rehabilitation Counseling at Mississippi State University. He holds a master's degree and a doctorate in rehabilitation counseling from the University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Ahonle has over 10 years of combined experience working as a CRC, rehabilitation counselor educator, and researcher. His research focuses on enhancing the rehabilitation outcomes of Veterans and people with acquired brain injuries.

Phillip Rumrill, PhD, CRC, is a Professor of Counselor Education at UK and Director of Research at HDI. He holds a Master's degree in Counseling from Keene State College in New Hampshire and a doctorate in Rehabilitation from the University of Arkansas. Dr. Rumrill is well known as one of the leading disabilities and employment researchers in the United States. He has authored or co-authored more than 450 professional publications. Dr. Rumrill has extensive experience administering funded research projects. He has had leadership roles on 44 grants with total budgets of more than \$53 million.

Stuart Rumrill, Ph.D., LPC, CRC is a post-doctoral research associate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the department of Kinesiology and Community Health. He received his doctorate in Rehabilitation Counselor Education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has over ten years of experience working with individuals with disabilities. His research interests include substance use disorders, quality of life and well-being, accommodation planning and ADA compliance, assistive technology and traumatic brain injury, and autism spectrum disorder and college success.

Presentation Title	<i>Ethical Considerations in Empowering Individuals with Visual Impairments: Understanding the 2023 Code of Professional Ethics for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors</i>
General description of the presentation (synopsis in 2-3 sentences used to attract audiences)	<p>Join us for an informative and engaging presentation on 'Ethical Considerations in Empowering Individuals with Visual Impairments.' Discover how the 2023 Code of Professional Ethics for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors guides ethical practice in empowering those with low vision or blindness. Whether you're a seasoned professional or new to the field, this presentation promises valuable takeaways for elevating your ethical practice.</p> <p>Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification. (2019). <i>Continuing Education Pre-Approval Manual For Organizations Providing Continuing Education To Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRCs), Canadian Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CCRCs), and CRCs Holding A Master Addictions Counselor (MAC) Or Clinical Supervisor (CS) Adjunct Designation.</i></p>

List at least two Learning Objectives (At the end of this session, participants will...)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understand the ethical principles outlined in the 2023 Code of Professional Ethics for CRCs. 2. Apply the ethical guidelines and principles discussed in real-world scenarios involving clients with visual impairments. Identify potential ethical challenges and dilemmas specific to their work with individuals with low vision and blindness.
Session length/duration	60

Session 4 Moderator: Tyler Griffin

Tyler Griffin is a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments at the Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and Blind where he has been serving for over 11 years. He is currently in the role of Special Services Coordinator with the district's Special Services office. He has worked within a wide range of areas and activities at the school including teaching braille and assistive technology, providing professional development for district staff, directing the K-12 music and performing arts program, coaching sports such as Goalball and Track and Field, and on-campus or community-based event planning. In 2016, Griffin was named the Mississippi School for the Blind Teacher of the Year and in 2023 he was named the district Employee of the Year. He completed a master's degree in the field of Teaching Students with Visual Impairments as one of the first cohort members of the Deep South Synergy² TVI Project at Jackson State University. Griffin is an active board member at large with the Mississippi Chapter of the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (MAER).

Presentation Title	Breaking Barriers to Recreation and Leisure for the Blind and Visually Impaired
General description of the presentation (synopsis in 2-3 sentences used to attract audiences)	This breakout session is designed to bring together professionals and individuals who are blind or visually impaired to discuss and address the various barriers that individuals face when it comes to accessing recreation and leisure activities. Through collaborative discussions and sharing of insights, we aim to identify solutions and strategies to make recreational and leisure activities more inclusive and accessible to all.
List at least two Learning Objectives (At the end of this session, participants will...)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. List three physical barriers which hinder social well-being for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. 2. Identify three negative perspectives which prevent inclusion of individuals who are blind or visually impaired in recreation and leisure activities. 3. Identify two strategies or solutions identified during discussions which would increase inclusion of individuals who are blind or visually impaired in recreation and leisure activities.
Session length/duration	60

Full Sessions resume Session 5

Presenter: Destin Parsley, Biloxi VA, Certified Therapeutic Recreation Therapist

Bio:

I was born and raised on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. I graduated from the University of South Alabama with a Bachelor's degree in leisure studies and therapeutic recreation. I began working at the Memphis VA in 2016 in acute spinal cord, PTSD, and adaptive sports. In 2019 I began working at the Biloxi VA in Blind Rehab. My favorite leisure and recreation activities are going to the islands, scuba diving, drawing and painting.

Co-Presenter: Garrett Davenport, Biloxi VA, Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist

Bio:

My name is Garrett Davenport, and I am a Recreational Therapist at the Blind Rehab Center in the Gulf Coast Veterans Healthcare System. I am 26 years old, and I was born in Jasper, AL. I received my degree from the University of South Alabama in 2021 and started working at the VA shortly after. I have some experience with mental health, but most of my practice has been with the visually impaired.

Presentation Title	Recreation Therapy for Individuals with Vision Loss
General description of the presentation (synopsis in 2-3 sentences used to attract audiences)	The purpose of the recreational therapy process. Examples of recreational activities and their adaptations for individuals with legal blindness or low vision. Testimonies for individuals who have benefited from recreation therapy at the blind rehab center and hands on experience participating in recreation activities by using glasses that simulate different vision loss conditions.
List at least two Learning Objectives (At the end of this session, participants will...)	1. Participants will be able to identify recreational activities individuals with low vision or vision loss can participate in to improve their overall health and wellbeing 2. Participants will be able to define types of recreation and the benefits of leisure on wellbeing of those with vision loss
Session length/duration	60 minutes

Session 6

Presenter: Kendra Farrow; Project Director
National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision, NRTC

Bio:

Kendra Farrow is a Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist. She is a graduate of Western Michigan University with 14 years' experience providing itinerant VRT services. Kendra currently works for the National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University. She is the project director for the older individuals who are blind technical assistance center, OIB-TAC.

Presentation Title	Finding Hope in the Darkness: Perspectives on Adjusting to Vision Impairment
General description of the presentation (synopsis in 2-3 sentences used to attract audiences)	Individuals of any age with less than perfect vision will encounter psychosocial challenges that need to be overcome if they wish to live a fully autonomous life. Challenges can be both internal, such as depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, and external, like attitudes, inaccessibility, over helping. This session will consider theories of adjustment and strategies that will help these individuals begin to find hope.
List at least two Learning Objectives (At the end of this session, participants will...)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.Participants will recognize which individuals typically experience the adjustment process.2.Participants will identify 3 philosophies about adjusting to blindness.3.Participants will identify strategies for addressing different reactions to vision loss.
Session length/duration	60 minutes

Session 7

PANEL DISCUSSION: Herb Humphrey, Moderator & Panelist, Garrett Pendergast, Kendra Farrow, & Tracy Ferro

After completing his military career in 2001, which included participating in the First Gulf War, Herbert Humphrey worked as a Paralegal/Legal Assistant in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area for 11 years. In 2012 Herbert was diagnosed as legally blind, resulting from a brain tumor. After a successful surgery to remove the tumor, he attended and successfully completed blind rehabilitation at the Addie McBryde Center for the Blind and the Blind Rehabilitation Center, VA Hospital, Biloxi, MS. He went on to work as Advocacy Coordinator for Mississippi Industries for the Blind, a position he held for 5 and a half years. Herbert is currently ADA Compliance Coordinator for the City of Jackson. Herbert is married with 5 children.

Kendra Farrow is a Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist. She is a graduate of Western Michigan University with 14 years' experience providing itinerant VRT services. Kendra currently works for the National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University. She is the project director for the older individuals who are blind technical assistance center, OIB-TAC.

Garrett Pendergast is an ACVREP Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist, Certified Vision Rehabilitation Specialist, Certified Teacher of the Visually Impaired, and an Assistive Technology Specialist. Since June 2022, he has been a Blind Rehabilitation Specialist (BRS) at the Gulf Coast Blind Rehabilitation Center, Department of Veterans Affairs in Biloxi MS. Prior to coming to the Department of Veterans Affairs, he was a Certified Teacher of the Blind and Visually Impaired and Activities of Daily Living (ADL) Instructor at the Foundation for Blind Children (FBC) in Phoenix, Arizona. FBC is a 501c3 which serves the blind and visually impaired community through their life cycle.

Garrett has a Master of Arts in Vision Rehabilitation Therapy and in Orientation and Mobility from Western Michigan University. He has a Master of Arts in Special Education, Visual Impairment Emphasis from University of Arizona.

Tracy Ferro is a retired United States Air Force Veteran from D'Iberville, Mississippi.

Presentation Title	Vision Beyond Limits: Embracing Recreation and Leisure with Vision Loss
General description of the presentation (synopsis in 2-3 sentences used to attract audiences)	During this compelling panel discussion, individuals with firsthand experience will provide valuable insights and perspectives about how they embrace recreation and leisure with vision loss.
List at least two Learning Objectives (At the end of this session, participants will...)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants will understand how individuals who are blind or visually impaired can be supported to pursue recreational interests. 2. Participants will recognize how being involved in a recreational or leisure activity affects the wellbeing of a person who's blind or visually impaired.
Session length/duration	60 minutes

Day 2, Saturday, October 28, 2023
Full Sessions
Keynote

Presenter (Keynote): Malinda Wimbs Department of Veterans Affairs CATS Supervisor

Bio:

Dr. Malinda Wimbs obtained a Master’s in counseling in 2005, became a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor in 2015, and acquired a Ph.D. in 2017. For seventeen years, she worked at the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services as a computer instructor and a vocational rehabilitation counselor and is currently employed at the Biloxi Blind Rehabilitation Center as CATS Supervisor. Dr. Wimbs strives to inspire and empower individuals with disabilities, providing strategies for overcoming and making dreams come true.

Presentation Title	Finding the Courage To Dream Big
General description of the presentation (synopsis in 2-3 sentences used to attract audiences)	Empowering individuals with disabilities requires increased societal and personal expectations. Recognizing barriers, then the small steps achieved is a large step toward reaching significant goals. Keys for successfully moving through adjustments of living with a disability are personal and individual, while common themes across these populations are found.
List at least two Learning Objectives (At the end of this session, participants will...)	Participants will gain a better understanding of how to respond to the needs of people living with a disability. 2 Participants will learn the role of compassion in supporting individuals with disabilities. 3.Participants will discover key strategies to help disabled populations experience success and achieve their personal goals as they move through the adjustment stages.
Session length/duration	75 minutes

Session 2

Presenter: Shelly Bates; University of South Alabama; Assistant Professor
Co-Presenter: Nancy Raia

Bio:

I worked as a recreational therapist for over 20 years with patients over the age of 55 in all aspects of care including skilled, acute behavioral health, assisted living, long-term care and hospice care. I have a Master's degree in recreational therapy from Clemson University, and a Ph.D. in instructional design and development from the University of South Alabama where I currently serve as assistant professor in recreational therapy.

Nancy Raia serves as Artist in Residence at the United States Sports Academy in Daphne, AL, after serving as Community Outreach Director of the Eastern Shore Art Center in Fairhope, AL since 2001 bringing the arts to the community. For her work in the community, she has received numerous awards including the Gulf Guardian Award for her environmental art lessons, the Mobile Arts Councils Educator Award and the AL Art Educator of the Year. She has taught art classes to students from ages 3-103 and she also brings art to senior living facilities, Veterans, works with students through art at the S/W Regional School for the Deaf and Blind and provides private and group art lessons for those with disabilities and chronic illnesses.

Presentation Title	Using Creative Art to Break Barriers
General description of the presentation (synopsis in 2-3 sentences used to attract audiences)	This session will provide background theoretical knowledge on creative expression in addition to resources for implementation. Hands-on opportunities to practice using creative expression will be offered that can be transitioned into multiple settings.
List at least two Learning Objectives (At the end of this session, participants will...)	1. Participants will be able to identify one element of creative expression which promotes active participation in leisure tasks with those who are visually impaired 2. Participants will be able to participate in at least one artistic skill that can be utilized to engage this population in a functional leisure task.
Session length/duration	60 minutes

Session 3

Presenter : Dorothy Young, Director of Mississippi Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Blind

Bio:

Dorothy Young is a graduate of Alcorn State University (B.S.); the University of South Alabama (M.S. in Counselor Education and Minor in Rehabilitation Counseling); and Belhaven University (Master’s in Management). In 2000, Ms. Young began work as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, with the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind. In the 2013, Ms. Young was promoted to the Director position for the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind Services, Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services. Dorothy L. Young serves on the National Executive Leadership team as the Technology Chair for the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind.

Presentation Title	<i>Services in Mississippi for Persons Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired</i>
General description of the presentation (synopsis in 2-3 sentences used to attract audiences)	This presentation will provide participants with information on the services that are currently available in Mississippi for working age adults who have a visual impairment. The participants will come away knowing the skills that individuals with a visual impairment need to thrive in their communities and to succeed in their work environments.
List at least two Learning Objectives (At the end of this session, participants will...)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Participants will learn how to better prepare their visually impaired clients for the workforce. 2.Participants will learn of the skills that visually impaired individuals need to thrive and live independently in their communities. 3.Participants will Increase their knowledge on the services available in Mississippi for working age adults with a visual impairment.
Session length/duration	30 minutes

Session 4

Presenter: Joann Judge, The University of Southern Mississippi; Assistant Professor

Bio:

Dr. Joann P. Judge is a professor in the School of Kinesiology & Nutrition at The University of Southern Mississippi. She received her Ph.D. in Kinesiology for Individuals with Disabilities from the University of Virginia. Dr. Judge is a Nationally Certified Adapted Physical Educator (CAPE); a licensed K-12 Health & Physical Education Teacher; and she has taught students with visual impairments at Camp Abilities in Brockport, NY, AZ, PA, and FL.

Presentation Title	Oh Yeah . . . Goalball, Beep Baseball AND Blind Soccer!!
General description of the presentation (synopsis in 2-3 sentences used to attract audiences)	Come and explore the world of goalball, beep baseball, AND blind soccer! Attendees will be provided an overview of the sports AND opportunity to explore the equipment, rules, & fundamental skills of goalball, beep baseball, AND blind soccer!
Area(s) of Topic (Please check all that apply)	Recreational activities to empower individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
List at least two Learning Objectives (At the end of this session, participants will...)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At the end of this session, participants will be able to identify three sports for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. 2. At the end of this session, participants will be able to describe the general concept of three sports for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. 3. At the end of this session, participants will be able to identify an online resource to support participation in sports for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
Session length/duration	60 minutes